



GLOBAL DESTINATION BRANDING: ARUBA'S JOURNEY

We create our brand, we live our brand, we are our brand. Our brand is who we are as a community, as human being. It's about the emotion that the island and its people evoke. It's what the island offers and stands for. It's reflective of the value we attribute to our lives in Aruba and the expressive value that our visitors attribute to their experience in Aruba. "Un Aruba dushi pa biba ta un Aruba dushi pa bishita", is the Aruba Tourism Authority's underlying philosophy for a sustainable development, and unequivocally captures the essence of the brand

Destination Branding

According to Duane Knapp, author of "Destination Branding", published in 2005, Destination Branding is defined as "the internalized sum of all impressions received by visitors and influencers resulting in a distinctive position in their minds/eye based on

perceived emotional and functional benefits." (Duane Knapp, 2005)

Where we were

In the 1980's and 90's, Aruba was "branded" as the ONE HAPPY ISLAND. That brand message reflected Aruba's distinct lifestyle, personality,

identity and essence.

Our guests experienced the "happy island" which was reflected by the feeling of a carefree, safe, hospitable island and islanders, who treated them as family and friend, with a degree of innocence, with genuine hospitality and warmth, with a natural inclination to

serve. They enjoyed a relaxing vacation in comfort and ease, with no hassles or worries, in a consistently warm, dry weather with cooling trade winds. The island owned the distinctive position of happiness that translated into emotional and functional benefits for its guest. Aruba became a place our guests wanted to return to. This resulted in a positive and lasting word of mouth to other potential guests. Aruba promised happiness and delivered on the promise. So much so, that it was engraved on the national license plate.

Our lifestyle, our personality, our soul, defined our brand. And our brand created the perception. And the perception was reality. And our guests lived this reality. What a beautiful story many of us formed part of. A story of giving (great vacation experience that fulfilled personal needs) and taking (satisfaction of fulfilling dreams, economic advantages).

The transition

In about 15 years, Aruba moved fast forward. Aruba developed from a 2000 hotel room island to a 7000-plus hotel room island. The population increased from 60,000 to over 100,000. The visitor arrival numbers increased from 200,000 to over 700,000 per year and Aruba's target market base was expanded from 6 markets to 13 markets in the world. The experience offered to our guests, transformed. More immigrants, more diversity, more activities, more restaurants, more cars, bigger airport, more hotels and more buildings, basically, more of everything. Sometimes more was better and sometimes it was not. There was also more emphasis on quality. Quality of accommodations, quality of service, quality of the experience. The traveler's vacation beha-

avior, demands and expectations also changed with time. Aruba's brand was evolving. Aruba transformed from a calm and carefree island of innocence to a cosmopolitan, fun driven, worldly island. Aruba became known for its cuisine, its diversity of cultures and wide choices of watersports and other activities, festivals. It reflected economic growth and a high standard of living. Notwithstanding everything, the hospitality of the people remained a central attraction.

Amidst this growth, development, transformation, innovation, modernization, expansion in the 1990's and 2000's, Aruba flirted with different taglines in marketing, such as "Your Pleasure is Our only Business", "An island all your own", and "Where Happiness Lives", in the United States. South America also experimented with "Aruba es Magia", "La Isla Feliz", "En Aruba esta sucediendo", and "Solo Faltas Tu". Brazil has used "E do Caribe" for twenty years. And Europe went from "Je Reinste Verwennerij", to "One Happy Island", during the past few years.

Where we are today

Today, our growth is still ongoing, with more condo, resort and timeshare development. It's in a final phase of \$400 million renovation, with a lot of airlift, more need for labor import and on the demand side, with worldwide awareness at its peak. We're at a moment in time where we are questioning ourselves whether Aruba can still make the same brand promises to our potential guests. We're asking ourselves whether our "unique selling points" have changed. We have to re-evaluate our brand promises and make sure our brand promise is true to us and that it indeed can be delivered

Aruba's Journey

The timing is perfect to start developing a global branding strategy. The world is "shrinking": the internet has made global accessibility extremely easy. In the next article Aruba's journey into the global branding strategy will be expanded upon. It all starts with a promise.....from us to ourselves and to our visitors....

**Myrna Jansen-Feliciano, is a graduate with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Journalism, with a minor in Marketing and Public Relations from the Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas. She has worked in Miami and New York for Hank Meyer & Associates, the Public Relations company for Aruba and after a few years with the Lago Oil & Transport Company in Aruba. She returned to the tourism business with the Aruba Tourism Authority and has worked from Public Relations Liaison, to Public Relations Director, Assistant Managing Director and for the last 6 years as the Managing Director. She is a strong believer that the ATA must acquire more flexibility in implementing its marketing plan to achieve greater heights in this demanding and volatile tourism industry. She also believes in the passionate, young and dedicated staff committed in achieving excellence to the benefit and in the general interest of the island and the community.*